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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003553

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SUBJECT: PROGRESS ON CAMP ASHRAF (MEK) TRANSITION

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3285

1B. BAGHDAD 2658

1C. BAGHDAD 1889

Classified By: Political Military Minister Counselor Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY. EmbOffs recently met with senior GOI stakeholders, including Minister of Interior (REF A), Minister of Defense, National Security Advisor, and Minister of Human Rights, regarding the transfer of security responsibility for the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) residents of Camp Ashraf. In all meetings, The GOI was pushed to develop a comprehensive transition plan through the inter-ministerial committee charged with dealing with the MEK, as well as the need for GOI representatives to meet with the Camp Ashraf leadership to deliver human rights assurances for the group.

12. (S) SUMMARY CONTINUED. Following the ministerial-level engagements, Prime Minister al-Maliki told Ambassador and MNF-I CG GEN Odierno November 6 that while the group were terrorists and were causing problems due to the international attention they attracted, he was committed to fulfilling the GOI assurances to treat the residents humanely and not to forcibly deport them to Iran. While he wouldn't authorize handing over private diplomatic assurances between the GOI and the USG to the Camp Ashraf residents, he would authorize the GOI inter-ministerial committee in charge of the matter to travel to Camp Ashraf and verbally present the assurances to the Camp leadership. END SUMMARY.

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Minster of Defense  
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13. (S) PolMil MinCouns met with Minister of Defense (MinDef) Abd al-Qadir Muhammad al-Mufriji October 18. MinCouns briefed MinDef on the current situation at Camp Ashraf and Emboffs' and Task Force-134 (TF-134) officers' meetings with the Camp Ashraf residents. The two also discussed the swapout of the two Iraqi Army (IA) battalions (BNs) that had recently occurred. (NOTE: The 3-37/9 IA BN arrived at Camp Ashraf October 19 to replace the 1st IA BN of the Baghdad Brigade. END NOTE.)

14. (S) MinCouns stressed the need for coordination between the IA battalion, the Iraqi Police (IP) group, and the coordinating committee of the Camp Ashraf residents. He noted that there have been productive coordination meetings among IA, IP, and U.S. Military Police (MP) officers, but IA and IP officers had not yet met with the MEK to coordinate on the security handover. MinCouns also noted the importance of allowing the MEK to continue to receive supplies into the camp, or the GOI would be faced with providing all provisions to the nearly 3300 residents. The MinDef replied, "These are professional soldiers, not prison guards. (The camp) is not a prison."

15. (S) MinCouns asked MinDef about the inter-ministerial committee charged with coordinating the security transfer for

Camp Ashraf and noted its importance since different elements of the GOI are involved. MinDef noted that he was head of the committee and that a planning element of the committee had met in preparation for a full meeting of the committee at the Ministerial level. They are still preparing and delays have been caused by the change out of IA units.

¶16. (S) MinDef noted that the MOD was responsible for external security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was responsible for individual residents and coordination with international organizations and foreign States. He also noted the important role of the Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR): "These are residents in Iraq, and they have human rights." He also stated that the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) was responsible for legal aspects in and external to the country and the Ministry of Interior is responsible for residency determinations and movement. He said all representatives will work in cooperation with representatives from the Embassy and TF-134.

¶17. (S) MinDef told MinCouns, "(The MEK) have to respect their presence in Iraq. Since 2003, the MEK has operated outside of the law. They have cooperated with terrorists and with groups in opposition to the GOI. Their actions have led to negative opinions of the group by Iraqi political parties. I am a man of security; I know what they've done since 2004. In any case, it's important to protect their human rights. At the same time, we can not put up with an armed organization working against a country with which we share a 1200 km border. It's time to resolve this peacefully. This is just one of Saddam's mistakes that we have to deal with."

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National Security Advisor  
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¶18. (S) MinCouns met with National Security Advisor (NSA) Dr. Mowaffak al-Rubaie November 4. MinCouns noted that coordination between TF 134 and Iraqi Security Forces was behind schedule due to the swap out of IA units. He not only stressed the need to coordinate security on the ground, but also the need to coordinate politically - the mission of the inter-ministerial committee. He noted the need for a consolidated GOI position on the transfer in order to avoid a potential humanitarian tragedy.

¶19. (S) During the meeting, MinCouns delineated three primary issues facing the transition of security responsibility for Camp Ashraf:

-- Permission for the IA and IP commanders to work with the Camp Ashraf leadership on security matters in order to move quickly to a seamless transition of security to the GOI in accordance with GOI assurances on the welfare of the Camp Ashraf residents. He noted that the residents are under threat from Iran, both extra-judicially and judicially, and wish to be involved in their own security. Up until now, unarmed residents have manned observation posts with radios and binoculars and have participated in the overall security of the camp.

-- The means for the camp to get food and supplies. Without the ability for the residents to do so independently, the GOI would have to supply all the camp's needs. According to the June 17 Council of Ministers Decree (REF C), Iraqi contractors were afraid to deal with the MEK. The residents were currently able to pay for supplies, but they also needed water. A pumping station 15 km from the camp needs maintenance, something the residents have provided in the past. Water from the pumping station not only supplies Camp Ashraf, but surrounding Iraqi communities as well.

-- The Minister of Human Rights had asked the Prime Minister (PM) to authorize the release to the MEK the human rights

assurances provided by the GOI to the USG (REF B). This has not yet happened.

¶10. (S) NSA recalled that the Governing Council first brought up the situation at Camp Ashraf in July 2003, and said only half in jest that Camp Ashraf "would probably still be there in 2020. The PM wants the residents to go back home and the residents want to stay - the solution will probably be somewhere in between."

¶11. (S) NSA told MinCouns that the PM's Office has been talking with the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, and noted that once the camp is under Iraqi control, they would probably allow families to visit the residents. MinCouns responded by saying that family visits could be one means to help break down the cult-like control of the residents. Although the NSA doubted the PM would look favorably upon the MOHR's request, he did pledge to look into the concerns. The NSA asked MinCouns when the USG's legal obligation and protected persons determination for the residents would end. MinCouns responded that the USG would have a continuing obligation to the residents until such time as it could be determined that all security and humane treatment assurances were being adhered to.

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Minister of Human Rights  
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¶12. (S) Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim told PolMil MinCouns and EmbOffs on November 5 that she is pushing the GOI to formulate a strategy for the transfer and responsibility for Camp Ashraf. She said there will be another staff-level inter-ministerial meeting on November 9 with participation from the Ministries of Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Human Rights. The Minister said the PM and other top GOI officials do not view the situation as a long-term problem and do not see the need for a strategy. However, she believes humanitarian concerns should be a top concern and will work with the other ministries to establish a plan, for example on how to provide food, water, and medicine to the MEK residents. She also emphasized the need for a plan on how to care for those who wish to leave the camp during the months before they could receive refugee status from UNHCR. After the upcoming inter-ministerial meeting, she said the USG and ICRC should join the GOI in preparation discussions.

¶13. (S) The Minister tentatively agreed to send more ministry representatives to Ashraf to meet with the leadership and the

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individual members. She was concerned that meeting with the leaders will reinforce their control of the residents and not allow the MOHR representatives to meet with individual members. MinCouns reassured her that the leaders will allow access to individuals, as they had done for ICRC, UNAMI, and USG officials, and emphasized that constant visits to the camp by MOHR officials will help clarify the GOI position and reassure the Camp Ashraf residents, including those who may want to leave. The Minister accepted the argument and recommended visits for a few days each where MOHR officials could talk to each individual and explain, for example, a process for leaving the camp.

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Inter-Ministerial Follow-up  
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¶14. (S) Subsequent to our high-level engagement on the MEK, the Minister of Human Rights met with MinDef November 5 and they discussed how the different issues will be divided up among the inter-ministerial committee (MOD-external security, MOI-refugee camp for defectors, MOHR-humanitarian concerns). The MOD was pleased with the arrangement, and decided more details will be worked out during the committee meeting

November 9. They also agreed that after the committee meeting, they will all meet with USG officials and the ICRC. The Minister of Human Rights also visited the Iranian Embassy, and among other issues, asked them for some sort of assurances from the Iranian Government concerning the MEK. She told them that the Camp Ashraf residents believe that they will be arrested or killed if they return to Iran. The Iranian official said he understood and said they could probably get some assurances that say "the MEK won't be killed/arrested/followed, etc." He will ask Tehran and get back to the Minister, but he thought it was a good idea. Such written assurances would be helpful if given to the Camp Ashraf residents when MOHR reps visit the camp. She believed that this could help resolve the situation of those residents who may want to leave.

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PM reiterates GOI commitment; says it will be shared with Camp

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¶15. (S) At the end of a November 6 meeting on other subjects, PM al-Maliki raised the issue of Camp Ashraf with Ambassador and MNF-I CG GEN Odierno. Stating the Camp Ashraf residents were "terrorists" who had enemies throughout Iraq because of their past activities in cooperation with the Saddam Hussein regime, the PM said he was unhappy with the amount of international attention the Camp Ashraf group was receiving. Despite Iraqis' strong antipathy to the group, the PM said he intended to keep the commitment his government had made to treat the residents humanely and to not forcibly return them to Iran. They should leave Iraq, he said, but Iraq would ensure this was done in a humanitarian manner with the involvement of the international organizations concerned. Regarding the written GOI assurances on the Camp, al-Maliki said these were a bilateral diplomatic exchange between the GOI and the USG and as such should not be shared with the Camp Ashraf residents. However, he stated, he could see a GOI delegation presenting the GOI position verbally to the Camp residents.

¶16. (S) Subsequent to the PM's comments, TF-134 received word that a delegation from MOI, MOI, MOHR and perhaps other agencies, desired to visit Camp Ashraf to meet with the leadership and make clear the GOI position on the Camp. Embassy and TF-134 are working to facilitate this visit as soon as possible.

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Comment  
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¶17. (S) After months of fitful progress on this issue, the GOI appears to be energized on moving forward with transition of security for Camp Ashraf. As the Camp Ashraf inhabitants had been lobbying against the transition and claiming that they only sought GOI assurances, if the assurances are given and the transition appears to be moving, Embassy and TF-134 will have to work hard to prepare the residents for the transfer. We expect the MEK will vigorously renew appeals to stop the transfer, and a likely reaction internationally and perhaps from Iran. We will continue to ensure all in the GOI understand the importance of a humanitarian approach to this issue.

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